

Water and Land Resources Division

MISSION STATEMENT: *The King County Water and Land Resources Division works to sustain healthy watersheds, protect wastewater systems, minimize flood hazards, protect public health and water quality, preserve open space, working farms and forests, ensure adequate water for people and fish, manage public drainage systems, and protect and restore habitats.*

WHAT WE DO

Water and Land leads the region in the development of comprehensive programs for storm and surface water, water quality, fish habitat, floods and resource lands. Nearly all these programs are paid for by specific fees for service, voter approved funding or federal and state grants, and do not compete for funding with other county services that are paid for from the county's general revenue fund. Three percent of WLRD's budget for critical agriculture, forestry and wildlife work is paid by the general fund.

YEAR 2000 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The past year was characterized by major accomplishments in land acquisitions, industrial waste management, scientific laboratory work, flood protection, noxious weed removal, construction projects and public education events. The division's largest successes, however, included the expansion of surface water management services, new partnerships with local governments, and expanded work to meet federal and state mandates, including the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act.

- **Construction Projects:** 15 capital construction projects totalling nearly \$2.7 million were completed and 21 designed to fix drainage problems, stem erosion and keep water clean.
- **Flood Protection:** Businesses and citizens of unincorporated King County pay 20 percent less for flood insurance because of the high federal rating of the County's flood management

protection program. In 2000, the program successfully leveraged federal/state disaster funds to purchase and remove five homes and elevate six homes chronically damaged by flood waters.

- **Lands Purchases:** 1,747 acres of open space and resource lands were purchased. The Division completed 33 transactions purchasing over \$9 million worth of precious resource lands crucial for salmon restoration, water quality and environmental preservation.
- **Removal of Noxious Weeds:** Weeds that are not native to our region, and that harm animals, humans and beneficial native plants, were removed from 2,383 sites.
- **Industrial Waste Management:** For the seventh consecutive year the County's biosolids have earned 'exceptional standards' for metals from the federal Environmental Protection Agency. This is a true indicator that work with local industries to keep toxic metals out of the sewage system is succeeding, and County biosolids, the end product of the sewage treatment process, are a safe crop fertilizer.
- **Environmental Laboratory:** An audit conducted by the Department of Ecology found King County's environmental lab to be, "among the best labs we have seen... the ability to retain staff long-term, the high quality of staff and management, and the excellent complement of instrumentation all contribute to this assessment."
- **Volunteer Events:** More than 10,000 citizen volunteers took part in hundreds of educational trainings and habitat restoration events that help protect and restore water quality and fish habitat.
- **Water Quality:** Scientific knowledge of lakes Washington and Sammamish will be greatly enhanced by five solar-powered, robotic, around-the-clock underwater sampling stations strategically anchored in the lakes. These cost-efficient, high tech tools will help scientists better understand the characteristics of the lakes and the impacts of human activities.



WHAT IS A WATERSHED?

A watershed is an area, bounded by mountains or hills, from which all rainwater flows to a single body of water, lake, stream, river or sound.

THE TOP FIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR THE WATER AND LAND RESOURCES DIVISION IN 2000 INCLUDED:

Interlocal Agreements

King County and more than three dozen local governments formed unprecedented new governing groups to pool resources and develop watershed-based salmon conservation plans. The new "interlocal agreements" for the Green/Duwamish, Cedar/Lake Washington/Sammamish and the Snoqualmie portion of the Snohomish River watersheds will help local governments and King County protect and restore watersheds while meeting federal requirements to protect threatened and endangered fish species.

Supporting Regional Response Effort to Endangered Species Act

Water and Land's biologists, engineers and hydrologists provided expertise to help identify, prioritize and leverage dollars for chinook salmon recovery projects in support of the Executive's Salmon Policy Office and as part of the County's Tri-County partnership.

Extending the Surface Water Management Service Area

Surface water management services are now available to all of unincorporated King County with the expansion of service to Vashon Island and the eastern two-thirds of unincorporated King County. The County can now respond to citizens outside the original service area established in the mid 1980s. This brings the County into compliance with mandates from both the federal Endangered Species and the Clean Water Acts.

Clean Water Act

Water and Land began work on a complicated two-year effort to show that its surface water management services and activities support renewal of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit. Once negotiated, the permit allows the County to administer a surface water management program that meets the law. Under this permit, the state Department of Ecology is able to implement specific elements of the federal Clean Water Act.

New Efficiency and Value for Customer Dollars

Initiated in part by the Executive's push for the County to work "better, faster, cheaper," and coupled with grassroots support from employees, Water and Land began a reorganization that will be completed by 2002. After a hard look at the numerous work groups put into the division as a result of King County's merger with Metro, a new, more efficient organizational structure is being developed.

OUTLOOK

In 2001, Water and Land Resources will focus on its comprehensive reorganization to become even more efficient at accomplishing its work. The new structure will increase accountability to division customers, ratepayers and policymakers while strengthening the link between on-the-ground services and scientific and technical work. Many capital programs and pilot projects are planned to solve chronic surface water and flooding problems in the new surface water service areas and restore habitat for fish. Continued work is expected in the development of a salmon recovery plan in partnership with local cities to meet endangered species requirements for salmon and bull trout. The Division will also continue to work for the preservation of working farms and forestlands.

In the years to come, the Water and Land Resources Division will continue to serve citizens by protecting and restoring the environment and fulfilling its mission to protect King County's waters and lands for a healthy future.